

OCLC on the Run

OCLC is running scared. [My comments](#) on their attempt to monopolize library records has been Slashdotted, [our petition](#) has received hundreds of signatures, and they're starting to feel the heat.

At a talk I gave this morning to area librarians, an OCLC rep stood up and attempted to assure the crowd that what I was saying "wasn't entirely true". "What wasn't true?" I asked. "I'd love to correct things." She declined to say, insisting she "didn't want to get into an argument."

This evening, OCLC's Vice President for WorldCat and Metadata, provides more details. In a blog comment (which, I understand, was sent to OCLC members), she tries to downplay the issue, continuing the OCLC trend of doublespeak about this serious change.

She tries to claim we're on the same side ("We are likely in solid agreement") and insists they are just updating "the principles ... which have been in place since 1987" and absurdly claiming that the new rules are just a "clarification". (This is just one of a number of black-is-white falsehoods in her post.)

But never once does she defend the actual changes. And they're right there in black-and-white: the records aren't allowed to be used in anything that "substantially replicates the function, purpose, and/or size of WorldCat." I'm not sure how much clearer they can get; these new rules prohibit anyone from building anything that gets anywhere close to WorldCat.

My fundamental point stands: As servers have gotten cheaper, it's become easy to do for free the things OCLC charges such outrageous amounts for. But OCLC can't have that — they'd have to give up their huge office complex and high salaries (Ms. Calhoun was recently hired away from academia, so her salary isn't available yet, but her fellow VPs make around \$300,000/year). So they're trying to stamp out the competition.

Karen insists that "OCLC welcomes collaboration with Open Library", which seems a funny way of putting it. As I said last time, they've played hardball: trying to cut off our funding, hurt our reputation, and pressured libraries not to cooperate. When we tried to make a deal with them, they dragged their feet for months, pretended to come to terms, and then had their lawyers send us an "agreement" to sign that would require we take all OCLC-related records off our site.

Karen, if you really want to "increas[e] information access to users around the globe", like you say, here's an easy first step: put the 2 million WorldCat web pages you shared with Google and Yahoo up for download on your website. It's only a small portion of your catalog and you've already shared it with others. Until you take even a baby step like that, it's hard to take your protestations of good intent seriously.

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